

Teachers as writers



Who me?

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**urges teachers
to share their
experiences
and become
contributors
to this journal.**



In an earlier edition of this journal, Paul Swan (1997) published an article called *Writing for journals: An avenue for professional development*. His article encourages teachers to share their experiences and ideas by becoming writers of *APMC* journal articles, and in doing so, engage in professional development. The set of guidelines Swan provided for developing an article for submission has inspired this new article.

Are you a primary school teacher? Then please read on. I have tried to anticipate your doubts and questions...

Why should I write an article?

Are you thinking, 'I don't really have anything important enough to share'? Well, there are thousands of teachers across Australia who have worthwhile experiences, ideas and stories to share, and the fact that you are interested enough to pick up this journal and start reading means it is extremely likely that you are one of them!

There are two main reasons for overcoming the initial reluctance to write. The first is the potential for the writing process to enhance your own teaching practice. As expressed by Swan (1997), 'It can be argued that writing a journal article is one of the best forms of professional development because it forces the author to reflect on his/her classroom experience and encapsulate just why this experience is worth sharing' (p. 22). We have all encountered the clarification that our thinking undergoes when we seek to explain it to someone else. The second reason for writing the article is to benefit the audience. The readers of *APMC* range from first

year undergraduates, through practising teachers, to seasoned mathematics educators, all of who delight in hearing the ‘teacher’s voice’ and have something to learn from the experiences and ideas of teachers. An additional reason for publishing an article is for the personal satisfaction. Even the most seasoned writers still get a ‘buzz’ from seeing their work in print and take pride in the achievement.

What could I write about?

Anything that has meaning for you as a teacher of mathematics could be the focus of an article. It might centre on a successful project, lesson, game or activity. (You may think other teachers might be doing similar things — but they have not written about it in this journal! Remember that there will be many more students and teachers who will not have had similar experiences to you.) The children themselves provide endless inspiration, through the work they produce, their surprising ways of thinking and reacting and their ability to challenge our professional knowledge and skills (just when we are feeling comfortable!) Sharing a story of your own learning, whether it was via a smooth or bumpy path, can also be a worthwhile focus for writing. You do not have to have all the answers. Indeed, you may pose a dilemma for the readers to ponder. If you are studying, you may have an assignment that can be reworked to suit the different audience. Whatever the topic, consider collecting photographs, diagrams or children’s work samples to enhance the communication and presentation.

How do I begin?

Start by reading through several issues of *APMC*, paying particular attention to articles written by classroom teachers (Swan, 1997). The articles in the *New Voices* section of the 2002 and 2003 issues will be of particular interest. This will give you a sense of the range of topics covered and the styles of writing accepted for publication. You will notice a difference in style between research-based articles (usually written by tertiary educators) and more practically-focussed pieces (usually written by primary teachers). Both types are highly valued by the *APMC* editors and the journal’s readers. You will also notice that most of the articles are quite short — just one to four pages. This increases the chance that busy teachers will finish reading the articles, and enables the editors to include sufficient variety of material to appeal to a wide range of readers.

When you have a topic in mind, and perhaps a vague

notion of the style, do not procrastinate: start writing. Just begin with a draft or rough sketching of a plan, then develop and expand. Do not agonise over a catchy title to start with: that will come to you later.

How do I get it ready for submission?

Swan (1997, p. 23) provides sound advice in saying:

Ask a friend/colleague to read your article and make constructive comments. The following checklist may be useful to consider when reading the article.

- Proof-read (i.e. look for typos and grammatical errors, free of discriminatory language and cultural bias).
- Consider the audience — will this appeal to others?
- Is the article clear and simple or verbose?
- Is the article free of jargon or acronyms familiar to small audiences? Remember *APMC* is a national journal, so watch using terms familiar only to teachers in your state.

Remember, if you wait until the article is perfect, it will never be submitted.

Check the inside front cover of a current *APMC* for submission details, but here are the basics.

- Prepare the article on a computer, preferably using Microsoft *Word* and Times 12 point font, keeping the format simple; e.g. bold headings, line space between paragraphs, italics for emphasis (the *APMC* designer will look after the fancy layout).
- Number pages and label any tables, diagrams, work samples or pictures.

(Some of these may have to be mailed in for scanning, etc.)

- Ensure copyright law has been respected. Other people's work and ideas must be acknowledged appropriately, even if direct quotes have not been used. Remember that pictures and diagrams copied from other publications, including most websites, are subject to copyright. This is the author's responsibility.
- The material can be sent to the AAMT office several ways; both hard and electronic copies are needed. Paper copies should be printed on one side only. Electronic copies can be sent on a labelled 1.4 MB floppy disk, Zip disk or CD-R, or as an email attachment.
- Include your full contact details (email is useful) and a couple of sentences about yourself (this is very helpful to the editors who want to understand the context of the article, particularly if you have not published before).

What happens next?

The AAMT Office and/or the *APMC* editors will correspond with you after receiving your article. The editors and one or two of the review panel will read and comment on the article. Expect to be asked to make revisions. This happens to even the most experienced writers, so do not be disappointed by it. The editors have the responsibility of shaping the material to meet a complex range of criteria and expectations. You will probably be sent a mixture of well-deserved praise and recommendations for changes, and then it is up to you how to act on that advice. This is also part of the professional development process, so take a positive view. Think of the editors as coaches rather than judges and feel free to discuss any aspects with which you are not comfortable. Do not give up. You are now very close to publication! It is standard practice to require authors to complete an *Author's Warranty* form, so if this has not already been submitted you will be sent one before publication, to be returned to the AAMT Office.

Reference

Swan, P. (1997). Writing for journals: An avenue for professional development. *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom* 2 (2), 22–24.

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